

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**ROADMAPS
FOR ENHANCING EMPLOYMENT OF
PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES THROUGH
ACCESSIBLE TECHNOLOGY**

**DEVELOPED BY PARTICIPANTS
AT THE
BUSINESS DIALOGUE ON
ACCESSIBLE TECHNOLOGY AND DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT**

PREPARED BY

**Assistive Technology Industry Association
and
US Business Leadership Network**



November 2007

This Executive Summary was funded through a sub-award from CESSI, Inc. which has received funding from the Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor. The opinions contained in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of CESSI or the U.S. Department of Labor.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ROADMAPS FOR ENHANCING EMPLOYMENT OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES THROUGH ACCESSIBLE TECHNOLOGY

Introduction and Overview

On September 24, 2007, a **Business Dialogue on Accessible Technology and Disability Employment** was held in Orlando, Florida. The Business Dialogue was sponsored by the Assistive Technology Industry Association (ATIA) and the US Business Leadership Network (USBLN) with the participation of the Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor and the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education. The purpose of the Business Dialogue was to provide cutting-edge business leaders and decision-makers with the opportunity to develop consensus Roadmaps to enhance the hiring, retention, and advancement of persons with disabilities and others through accessible technology.

Participants at the Business Dialogue included business leaders across a wide range of companies in size—from Fortune 500 to small family-owned businesses. Industry sectors represented included assistive technology, banking, computer services, consulting services, financial services, hospitality and entertainment, insurance, medical, pharmaceutical, retail, technology, and venture capital. Also in attendance were representatives from key government agencies, including the Department of Labor, the Department of Education and the General Services Administration and support staff from ATIA and USBLN.

The Roadmaps affirm current successful business policies and practices and identify new strategic policies and practices. The Roadmap for the business community identifies the actionable steps that can be taken by the business community to facilitate the adoption of these policies and practices by masses of businesses. The Roadmap for the federal government identifies actionable steps that can be taken by the federal government to facilitate implementation of successful policies and practices by masses of businesses. The Roadmaps' official launch date is January 31, 2008 at the ATIA Leadership Forum on Accessibility in Orlando, Florida.

Successful Business Strategies

Business leaders at the Business Dialogue identified four successful business strategies that enhance the employment of persons with disabilities through accessible technology:

- Securing **leadership** by CEOs and other high level corporate executives and by a network of other internal “champions” promoting disability employment through accessible technologies.

- Making the **business case** including return on investment and benefits to the company, solving labor shortages or employee turnover problems, and improving productivity and/or reducing costs.
- **Refining and advancing corporate policies, practices, and programs** to include people with disabilities in the corporate vision and mission statements as well as the company's diversity, customer service, communications, mentoring, recruiting, vendoring, website accessibility and telecommuting programs, as appropriate.
- **Implementing corporate infrastructures and organizational strategies** that enable the company to realize and sustain the vision and the promises reflected in the policies, practices, and programs described above; establishing an employees with disabilities affinity group; creating cross-functional teams to address intra-corporate communication and decision-making; establishing centralized accommodations strategies; and establishing accountability mechanisms for ensuring implementation of accessibility initiatives.

Roadmap for the Business Community

The ten identified actionable steps that could be taken by the business community to facilitate the adoption of these policies, practices, and infrastructures by masses of businesses were:

- Support forums and other opportunities to spread the word through generic business organizations and associations.
- Support business organizations and associations whose mission includes enhancing employment of persons with disabilities e.g., develop a communications, messaging, and marketing plan; offer business-to-business technical assistance; and establish a process for certifying companies that adopt policies consistent with the principle of universal design.
- Support the establishment of a network of disability and/or accessibility managers working for businesses.
- Support the establishment of a network of professionals with disabilities.
- Promote new careers in business such as accessibility manager, as well as technical leadership positions.
- Promote procurement policies such as Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act that require the purchase of accessible information and communication technology by federal agencies.
- Promote organizations that establish accessibility standards.
- Support disability study programs that empower persons with disabilities to become financially literate and become a true market force.
- Adopt pledges and pacts by and among businesses to purchase only accessible information and communication technology.
- Encourage business foundations to support business initiatives designed to enhance employment of persons with disabilities through accessible technology.

Roadmap for the Federal Government

Business leaders then identified actionable steps that could be taken by the federal government to facilitate implementation of successful practices by masses of businesses. Key steps include:

- Convene a leadership summit on enhancing profits and worker productivity through accessible technology (attendees to include high-level government appointees and CEOs).
- Support business organizations and associations, including generic and disability-focused business organizations, that are willing to pursue the types of initiatives described above.
- Support peer (business-to-business) technical assistance such as the establishment of a single portal for obtaining information and technical assistance on a confidential basis.
- Expand the role of higher education e.g., support efforts to include universal design into curriculum used by students studying engineering, web design, business, marketing, and architecture.
- Support initiatives for entrepreneurs, especially entrepreneurs with disabilities.
- Research and modify employer incentives and supports, including tax incentives.
- Adopt an investment tax credit policy that encourages investment in new markets for persons with disabilities and others such as mature adults experiencing functional limitations.
- Expand research initiatives including research leading to commercially-viable innovations and research supporting case study and scenario planning.
- Expand awards and recognition programs.
- Enter into partnerships with foundations.

Summary and Next Steps

The Business Dialogue was intended to initiate a process of ongoing interaction and feedback between the business community, the federal government, and other stakeholders to enhance the employment of persons with disabilities through accessible technology. It is our hope that the Roadmaps developed by business leaders at the Business Dialogue will stimulate and encourage others to continue the dialogue and establish priorities for taking action.